**HC 477: Thesis Prospectus[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Professor Melissa Graboyes**

Fridays, 10:00 – 11:50; 101 Chapman Hall

Fridays, 12:00 – 1:50; 101 Chapman Hall

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**Overview**

The educational experience in the Clark Honors College culminates in a thesis written in your major but with the goal of making your research reach even beyond your specialty and your major so you can convey its broader significance to general audiences. The thesis offers the opportunity to delve into the research that most interests and excites you, in which you use the foundational blocks of critical thinking, analytical reading, effective writing, clear oral communication, independence, problem-solving, and creativity that you have been learning in both the Honors College courses and in your major. This thesis prospectus course launches you into this thesis project and the various aspects of the research process. At the end of the course you should feel reasonably prepared to embark on the thesis in efficient ways, with a good relationship cemented with your advisor, and with explicit steps to take to complete your thesis on schedule.

The thesis is based on original research, creative questioning, rigorous study, and scholarly exchange not only with published scholarship but also with a community of scholars here on campus. A written thesis and public defense/presentation of the research provides an exceptional opportunity to refine communication skills. Conceptualizing, researching, writing, presenting, and completing a thesis also teaches terrific time management skills and empowers students to be independent, confident, and productive. The relationship with the thesis advisor and full thesis committee is also paramount to the process—both for students to benefit from faculty mentorship and to foster professional relationships to help advance your career well beyond the Honors College. Completing a thesis offers an enormous academic and intellectual benefit, training students to engage with the world, be productive citizens, contribute to broader knowledge, and resolve major issues. An Honors College thesis also transcends research just in your major, because we ask that you explain its significance to a larger community, in line with your liberal arts education. This thesis is thus more, not less or dumbed down, from what you might do solely within your major. But not to worry: you have been training for this experience over the last several years. The thesis is the culmination of your entire UO education.

The thesis process will evaluate students in terms of the following criteria: initiative and self-direction, originality of the topic, research quality and depth, writing style and excellence, and quality of the oral defense. This Thesis Prospectus course is intended to position and prepare you for each of these aspects of the thesis writing and defense.

Your primary assignment for the course is to complete a superb thesis prospectus. By preparing this prospectus and presenting it to both the class and your thesis advisor, you have the opportunity to test out your research plan prior to jumping full swing into the thesis itself. Additionally, you will read and critique other students' prospectuses and hear (and ask questions about) each prospectus. The course is thus designed around peer interaction, support, and critical engagement across a range of disciplines. After all, one of the benefits of your Honors College education is multi-disciplinarity—teaching you how to communicate and interact with colleagues who come from a host of majors and disciplines that aren’t yours. This is a strength, not a distraction. The quality of our course depends on the quality of your interactions with each other.

*The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation, please notify me as soon as possible (and contact the Accessible Education Center, 155 Oregon Hall). If AEC letters do not arrive to me by week 2, making retrospective accommodations is not guaranteed. I am unable to make accommodations without AEC letters.*

**Course Learning Objectives (*by the end of this course you will be able to . . .*)**

1. Identify the precursors and preparation needed to embark on a major research project—from language and travel needs to human subjects approval, data access, and working in a lab
2. Explain how to settle on a topic and develop successful research questions
3. Explain research methods in your major and specific field of study, which involves clarity about how one actually does the research, data collection, analysis, and final delivery of research results
4. Begin to engage in intellectual, scholarly dialogue with other researchers in your specialty, which involves both the placement of your research within a specific body (or bodies) of literature and the articulation of your research contributions to existing scholarship
5. Frame your thesis in a larger societal context to convey clear broader impacts and/or to indicate cross-disciplinary contributions of your research project
6. Describe best practices for compiling a thesis committee and interacting with the various committee members throughout the thesis process, from the prospectus to the final defense
7. Explain your thesis project and plan through both: (1) a 8-12 page prospectus developed in several stages and drafts over the term; and (2) several formal and informal oral presentations
8. Critically and constructively evaluate the work of your colleagues in written and oral form—and receive such critical and constructive feedback yourself

**Obligations**

There are several assignments and obligations that you must complete successfully to pass this course:

* attend all classes
* complete all assignments explained on the Course Schedule below
* write an 8-12 page thesis prospectus with all its required components
* defend the prospectus in an oral presentation to the class and your thesis advisor
* arrange for your thesis advisor to attend your prospectus defense during our class time
* read and prepare comments and questions on other students' prospectuses
* submit the final thesis prospectus that your advisor has approved and signed on the cover page
* submit a graduation audit that you have also gone over with Professor Graboyes individually

**Grading = Pass/No Pass**

This course hinges on your participation in class, engagement with your peers' work, and completion of all assignments—on time. Unfinished, sloppy, incomplete, rude, or late materials and class participation will jeopardize your ability to pass the course. We are a supportive and engaged community working out of respect and genuine interest in helping each other improve our educational path and producing a stronger thesis.

**Prospectus**

Preparation of your thesis prospectus is an excellent way not only to begin or continue independent thesis research but also to develop a good working relationship with your advisor, to establish and meet long-term deadlines, to learn to revise your work, to engage in scholarly dialogue, and to communicate the thesis project to a broader audience beyond your major discipline.

Your final thesis prospectus (8-12 pages) must have the following components:

* cover page, **signed by your advisor when the final draft is submitted**
* project description (introduction and framing) that explains the topic/subject, including justification for why this research is important to do
* research questions, which should also include your tentative argument or hypothesis
* literature review that places the research topic into a scholarly discussion or a body of existing literature—and explains how your research contributes to gaps in this body of literature
* methods (or research strategy) that explains how you'll complete the research, what data you'll collect, what material you'll analyze, and how you'll analyze the materials. This is a crucial component that is essential to think through carefully. It must be detailed.
* preliminary outline that breaks down the thesis into smaller sections and explains what each section will involve, include, and accomplish
* timetable for thesis completion, which includes research progress milestones, chapter draft deadlines, and other deadlines that are important for your success and your smooth interaction with your thesis advisor and committee. Work with your thesis advisor to establish the timeline and deadlines for each specific stage.
* annotated bibliography

**Oral Defense with Advisor in Attendance**

Everyone will sign up for a day and time during Weeks 7-10 to present the thesis prospectus during class time. You need to ask your advisor to be present during your presentation. Please ask politely and courteously if she/he is able to do this, and if your advisor has any weeks when they cannot attend. You are beginning a long working relationship with your advisor at this point, so let's be sure to get off on the right foot through open, transparent, consistent, and courteous communication.

Here are some tips for successful presentations during the thesis defense when your advisor attends our class:

* mention your advisor and indicate why you are working with them, what their expertise brings to your project and how they can help you
* have an explicit point and sell it, convince the audience (presentations that just explain information are dull; instead, set up a riddle, convince the audience of its importance, and sell your plan for solving the riddle in the course of your thesis research)
* show that you have done thorough research to date, being specific about the existing literature
* play to your own strengths and interests in the presentation; be creative
* make sustained eye contact with the entire audience; avoid looking at the screen
* have a clear introduction and conclusion, as well as logical organization
* speak clearly and confidently
* connect with the audience somehow—through an anecdote, reference to something everyone knows about or to popular knowledge, etc.
* demonstrate passion for the subject (your interest engages the audience and, believe it or not, makes you sound smarter)
* use accompanying images, videos, music, samples, etc. to complement and reinforce your points while engaging the audience
* avoid too much text on Power Point or Prezi slides
* do not exceed your allotted time of 5 minutes

**Comments and Feedback on Peer Work**

You are expected to comment on other students' thesis prospectuses and in-class presentations. Be kind and helpful for your colleagues. Productive criticism is very useful. On the other hand, critiques that are mean, vindictive, ego-driven, baseless, or vague are detrimental to the presenter and the entire class—and will thus be penalized.

You might initially believe that you're unable to comment on someone else's prospectus that is in a radically different field from your own. However, the Honors College has (hopefully) taught you to think and analyze across disciplinary boundaries. What's more, you can always comment on issues such as clarity of writing, tone, the author's success in conveying the topic to a broad audience, the stated significance of the thesis subject and whether that's compelling and clear to you, the methods, the organization and whether it's clear and logical, the evidence identified to prove the proposed argument, or the feasibility of the thesis given the time and resources available.

Final note on criticism: be kind and constructive. Remember that you, too, will be in the same situation. So have sympathy for your fellow students but hold them to a very high standard.

Authors who are reading everyone's critiques should also recognize that others are trying to help you. Do not take critiques personally. Listen and try to understand. Even if you know your way is "right," or that the person critiquing you missed your point, then you can still learn that someone else didn't see it the way you did so it is a good time to be more precise and rework things.

**Graduation Audit**

During the term, you need to see Professor Graboyes in her office hours with your graduation audit completed. The audit is available on the Canvas website. Do the best you can filling it out in advance. We will then go through it, we'll sign it, and you'll have that piece of the course completed. Failure to complete this form and go over it with me in person will be grounds for failing this course.

**Course Schedule and Assignments**

**Week 1: September 28**

**Introduction & Tips for Success**

* Know the Process: Thesis timelines, expectations; making a research/work plan
* Know Yourself: Figuring out how to work successfully
* Committee Members, Forms, Resources, FAQs

In Class Assignment: Complete a detailed “Tasks and Timeline to Completion” of your thesis, outlining what you foresee as all the stages of your research process (data collection milestones, full literature review, analysis steps, etc.), the writing of drafts (including deadlines), and the final delivery of the thesis and thesis defense. Later in the quarter you will work specifically with your advisor to refine and possibly adjust the timeline to completion.

**Week 2: October 5**

**Thesis and Prospectus Components**

**Research Ethics & Human Subjects Research: Guest Speaker second half of class, Dr. Carolyn Craig**

Reading: Read at least two thesis prospectuses (available on Canvas) and skim at least two theses (in the Chapman library). These should ideally be in your discipline or the closest one you can find.

Assignment: Answer the following questions and bring to class a paragraph or so for each bullet point:

* What makes a good CHC thesis (what components or characteristics make it good), specifically in your major?
* What are the specific and unique obstacles to producing an effective thesis in your discipline and sub-field, and how can those be overcome?
* What should a good thesis avoid?
* Given your specific research topic, how specifically will you overcome specific obstacles and challenges and make your thesis successful?
* What are specific, unique aspects of your thesis that might require variation or particular approaches that you did not see in other prospectuses or theses?

**Week 3: October 12**

**Literature Reviews and Annotated Bibliography**

Assignment: This week you will write a draft of the Literature Review section of your prospectus, and turn in an annotated bibliography of 10-12 sources. The annotated bibliography should include a few sentences on each source’s relevance to your topic. You must bring 3 printed copies of your lit review to class. In class, everyone will work in small-group format to read, peer-edit and discuss each prospectus.

**Week 4: October 19**

**Lightning Presentations**

Assignment: Students will give a presentation in class that is 6 slides, 30 seconds each slide—time limits strictly enforced. Presentations will cover the following topics: (1) research questions; (2) contribution to existing literature (in the form of: existing literature has to date covered X, Y, and Z but my thesis will contribute to this literature by doing A and B); (3) tentative hypotheses or argument for the thesis; and (4) broader significance and contributions of your thesis project. Notice that we are not covering content and information on your research topic, but rather striving here for the analysis and placement of your thesis within existing literature and our larger society.

Following your presentation in class, you must write down in class and hand me three aspects of your oral presentation that went well and three areas for improvement on the next in-class formal presentation. These points should be about presentation skills and delivery, not about the thesis content.

**Week 5: October 26**

**Methods**

Assignment: In a write-up of two to three pages, answer the following questions after discussing them with your advisor and reading literature in your discipline on your research topic. These questions are intended to be "conversation prompts" to help structure a productive conversation with your advisor about effective research practices and methods in your discipline. The questions include the following:

* Specific to your research question, what are the ways in which you could answer the question? Identify two different approaches using different types of data (sources)

More generally, discussing methods in your area:

* What are typical research methods in your particular subfield?
* What kind of data do they analyze?
* How do they collect it or access it? Is there anything particularly challenging for your own project about data collection or access—and how might you overcome any obstacles?
* How do researchers typically organize, store, manage, curate, clean, and/or maintain the data or evidence collected during research? How time-consuming is this portion of the research process, and what pitfalls do early researchers face when managing data/evidence?
* How do researchers in your specialty usually analyze data? Does this tend to be quantitative or qualitative analysis? Is software required to own and operate? How long does it typically take to analyze the data or evidence once it is compiled? Is there anything unusual or challenging about data analysis for your specific project?
* If you are working in a research lab, then also ask:
  + How do the various researchers (professor, postdocs, graduate students, undergraduates) collaborate and interact? Who will you generally interact with?
  + How would you develop your own individual portion/part/aspect/component of the larger lab project that will become your own thesis?
  + How will your own thesis fit into the larger goals and plans of the lab?

Assignment: Share your “Tasks and Timeline to Completion” of your thesis with your advisor and discuss where/how your advisor would recommend changes. Modify this document.

**Week 6: November 2—NO CLASS**

**Thesis Prospectus Development and Writing**

Assignment: Work on the draft of your thesis prospectus to turn in during the Week 7-10 advisor visits and prospectus presentations. This is also a good week to visit office hours to discuss specific questions, or to **complete your graduation audit.**

**Week 7: November 9**

**Advisor Visits and Prospectus Presentations, Students 1-4**

Assignment #1: Write and submit (via Canvas) a full and complete version of your thesis prospectus. You must post your prospectus to Canvas at least 48 hours before class starts (Friday class= post by Wednesday). Also, when you post it on Canvas, also send it to your advisor, reminding your advisor of the time and place when she/he will attend our class to hear your presentation and ask questions.

Assignment #2: Give a 7-minute presentation in class about your thesis with your advisor in attendance. The presentation will be followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers, driven primarily by the advisor with students in class asking questions if time is available.

Assignment #3: During the two weeks when you are not presenting, you are responsible for reading all of the prospectuses, and you must bring written feedback for TWO of the prospectuses.

**Week 8: November 16**

**Advisor Visits and Prospectus Presentations, Students 5-8**

Assignment #1: Write and submit (via Canvas) a full and complete version of your thesis prospectus. You must post your prospectus to Canvas at least 48 hours before class starts (Friday class= post by Wednesday). Also, when you post it on Canvas, also send it to your advisor, reminding your advisor of the time and place when she/he will attend our class to hear your presentation and ask questions.

Assignment #2: Give a 7-minute presentation in class about your thesis with your advisor in attendance. The presentation will be followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers, driven primarily by the advisor with students in class asking questions if time is available.

Assignment #3: During the two weeks when you are not presenting, you are responsible for reading all of the prospectuses, and you must bring written feedback for TWO of the prospectuses.

**Week 9: November 23—NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK!**

**Week 10: November 30**

**Advisor Visits and Prospectus Presentations, Students 9-12**

Assignment #1: Write and submit (via Canvas) a full and complete version of your thesis prospectus. You must post your prospectus to Canvas at least 48 hours before class starts (Friday class= post by Wednesday). Also, when you post it on Canvas, also send it to your advisor, reminding your advisor of the time and place when she/he will attend our class to hear your presentation and ask questions.

Assignment #2: Give a 7-minute presentation in class about your thesis with your advisor in attendance. The presentation will be followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers, driven primarily by the advisor with students in class asking questions if time is available.

Assignment #3: During the two weeks when you are not presenting, you are responsible for reading all of the prospectuses, and you must bring written feedback and questions for TWO of the prospectuses.

**DUE by Thursday, December 6, 10 am:**

**Final (Revised!) Thesis Prospectus, Signed by your Advisor**

**Graduation Audit, Signed by Professor Graboyes**

1. This course model is taken from that re-imagined and developed by Professor Mark Carey in spring 2017, and the language in this syllabus is also largely borrowed, as I think it’s excellent. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)